

VZCZCXRO5048
OO RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHVB #0278 0861242
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 261242Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8782
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ZAGREB 000278

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR BRADTKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SECRETARY RICE'S VISIT TO CROATIA

REF: ZAGREB 269

Classified By: Ambassador Robert Bradtke, Reason 1.4 D

¶1. (C) Madame Secretary, the Croatia that you will visit with President Bush after the NATO Summit in Bucharest is a success story, albeit imperfect, in transformational diplomacy. After Dayton in 1995, Croatia emerged from a brutal ethnic conflict with ten percent of its territory still patrolled by UN peacekeepers, with more than 13,000 killed, with hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons, and with billions of dollars of damage to its economy. It was ruled by an authoritarian, nationalist leader who was eyeing covetously his Bosnian neighbor and eroding civil liberties inside the country. Now, a little over a decade later, Croatia has become a solid democracy, stands on the threshold of NATO membership, and is sending its soldiers to Afghanistan and eleven UN peacekeeping missions.

¶2. (C) The President's visit will celebrate this success. The Croatians themselves, first and foremost, deserve the credit for rejecting extreme nationalism, rebuilding their economy, and strengthening rule of law. The United States and the European Union played key roles in providing assistance and, when necessary, pressure for reform and cooperation with the Hague Tribunal. But, even more important than our assistance was the powerful attraction of membership in NATO and the EU and the desire to be part of the Euro-Atlantic community of nations. There is perhaps no better example of this "transformation" than Prime Minister Sanader himself, who abandoned his nationalist leanings and remade himself into a center-right, pro-European politician, who is the greatest advocate for Croatia's membership in NATO.

¶3. (C) Over the past six months, we have used the prospect of NATO membership and a Presidential visit to check off nearly every major item on our bilateral "to do" list: conclusion of a supplemental Status of Forces Agreement, negotiation of an Open Skies Agreement, continued progress by the Croatian government in dealing with war legacy issues such as refugee returns and prosecution of alleged war criminals, and most recently, Croatia's recognition of an independent Kosovo. In addition, Croatia has proven a consistent supporter of USG objectives within the UNSC, which Croatia joined as a non-permanent member in January of this year. Finally, Croatia's ISAF troops continue to perform commendably, particularly their OMLT contingent, and the Croatian government is in the process of increasing its deployment to Afghanistan from 200 to 300 troops over the course of 2008.

¶4. (C) This will enable the President to deliver a positive message both to the Croatians and to the region (which the Croatians see as "Southeastern Europe" and not the "Balkans" with all its negative historical connotations). I have urged

the President (reftel) to use his visit to: (1) congratulate the Croatians on their NATO invitation and achievements since independence; (2) stress that the hard work will have to continue after the NATO invitation as Croatia assumes the responsibilities and burdens of membership; and (3) point out that Croatia's success in transforming itself shows to other countries in the region that the hard work of reform pays off and earns the reward of acceptance into Euro-Atlantic institutions. I believe these themes can be used consistently throughout the visit, in all the President's activities, and in your comments at any events as well.

15. (C) Following the bilateral events in Zagreb, the White House has asked the Croatians to be prepared to host a lunch for the "leaders of NATO invitees." While the participation remains to be determined, I believe that whatever the attendance, the President should use this event to encourage the countries of the region to cooperate closely with each other. For the Croatians this means resisting two temptations: either to think that with NATO membership they can turn their back on the region; or that now they can play big brother to their less advanced siblings. Instead, Croatia needs to work as a true partner in helping all countries in southeastern Europe to achieve their Euro-Atlantic aspirations. It would be good if you and the President can reinforce this point.

16. (C) Madame Secretary, on behalf of all my colleagues at Embassy Zagreb, let me say that it will be a great honor to have you here in Zagreb, and if I may add a personal note, I have not forgotten the promise that I made to you at my swearing-in.
Bradtke